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Issues Vendor/Library Relations -- What Movie Is This Anyway: La Dolce Vita or My Life as a Dog?

Mark Sandler

University of Michigan, sandler@umich.edu

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special. Take *Field of Vision*, for example, a National Book Award winner. It is not a hard novel to read, unlike those of some writers I won't name, but when I finished reading it, I wondered how he had written it, technically. His photo essays are stark, Nebraska depictions, no people, but evocative of lost souls and lost lives that he writes about in some of his novels.

While in the Army, a former high school teacher used to send me care packages of books and in one package was *A Mississippi River Reader*, edited by **Wright Morris**. It is a paperback and, for **Morris** collectors, a scarce item. My copy has an ink (fountain pen) notation by **Morris's** name, "A Nebraskan." My friend was born in Council Bluffs but educated in Nebraska. Look at a map and you will see the connection.

Later, as a graduate student at **Berkeley** and working at the Rare Books and Special Collections Department (now part of the **Bancroft Library**), I witnessed **Peter Howard**, of **Serendipity Books**, appraise stacks of gray archival boxes full of the manuscripts of **Wright Morris** and in our vault, there were all of the first editions. I had to read them and from *My Uncle Dudley* on, I was an admirer. **Morris** was teaching at **San Francisco State** back then and happily decided to bless **Cal's** library and not **Stanford's** or **S.F. State's**, not that they aren't worthy institutions but I wasn't working for them and would have been deprived of the glorious sight of those gray boxes.

Move ahead about twenty years and I found myself inviting **Wright Morris** to speak at the annual dinner of the Library Associates of the University of the Pacific Libraries. I had read his books, had written a fan letter to him, and now I was going to meet him.

I still have the tape of the talk he gave that night and some more notes from him but my favorite memory concerns our talk about Chicago and the errand I undertook on his behalf.

In one of his autobiographical works, **Morris** talks about his boyhood experience at the **Larrabee YMCA** in Chicago, **Blackhawk** and **Larrabee**, if I remember correctly. I told him that I would be in Chicago soon for an **ALA** conference and would be glad to visit the **Larrabee Y** and take some pictures for him.

I was staying at the **Chicago Hilton** so after all my meetings were over, I walked out front and waited for a cab. Luckily, the cab driver was a native of Chicago, an African American of my age, almost exactly. I didn't have an address, only an intersection and that is where I told him I wanted to go. As he slowly pulled out onto Michigan Avenue, he asked if I would mind telling him why I wanted to go there. I told him, he smiled, and seemed really pleased that I was doing


this for a writer with a homesickness for a boyhood haunt.

He told me that the neighborhood had once been mainly Italian but was now African American. When we got there, the **YMCA** was gone and a magnet high school sat in its place. There was an abandoned building, low to the ground, an outbuilding of some kind, cater corner from the school and an "El" track in the distance but otherwise, just vacant lots. The cab driver asked if I wanted him to wait while I took my pictures and I obligingly said yes.

Wright Morris laughed and gently chastised me on the telephone when he called to thank me for the photographs. I had left my good Yashica 35mm camera at home, I forgot it. So I had to buy disposable camera and it was with that that I took the pictures for a man who had received two Guggenheim fellowships for his photography.

After my art work was finished, the cab driver took me to the area's new **YMCA** and then drove me back to the **Hilton** while telling me about his boyhood in Chicago, letting me know how much he loved his city, the city that **Wright Morris** grew to live in just a few months and no more, at least not as a resident.

Wright Morris died last year in his nineties. I lost contact with him because we really weren't friends. I collect his books, I have a few notes from him, and I have those memories of a meal and a private conversation with one of the best of American writers.

There are other writers in my collection that I haven't mentioned and haven't done justice to some mentioned here, but they will have to wait for another time. We can't all be writers, but we sure as heck can be readers and that ain't all bad. 

Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — What Movie Is This Anyway: *La Dolce Vita* or *My Life as a Dog*?

by **Mark Sandler** (Collection Development Officer, Graduate Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI) <sandler@umich.edu>

Column Editor: **Bob Nardini** (Senior Vice President & Head Bibliographer, YBP Library Services, 999 Maple Street, Contoocook, NH 03229; Phone: 800-258-3774 x3251; Fax: 603-746-5628) <rnardini@ybp.com>

Column Editor's Note: Any librarian who makes sales calls on fellow librarians has earned the right to reflect publicly on the world shared by vendors and librarians. Mark Sandler is Collection Development Officer at the Graduate Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. — BN

Since 1998, I've been moonlighting from my day job as collection officer at the **University of Michigan** to promote a joint initiative between my institution, **Oxford University**, and **ProQuest Information and Learning**. (Writing this column is an example of the kinds of promotion I've been doing but it's usually more direct, hand-to-hand combat.) **ProQuest** owns and markets digital images of 125,000 volumes of **Early English Books (EEBO)** accessible through searchable MARC records. The vision we've advanced at **Michigan** is that the academic community could create a significant number of searchable and readable full-text editions of the **EEBO** works. This subset of 25,000 texts, accurately keyed and tagged in

SGML, is being developed under an agreement with **ProQuest** that maintains links between the text and image editions but conveys full ownership rights of the text-file to institutions funding the conversion. The **EEBO-Text Creation Partnership** — a coalition of approximately 80 libraries funding this project — is now seeing some return on investment in the form of a database of full-text digital editions. The **TCP** has set a goal of 150 partner institutions with total revenue targeted at \$9,000,000. As of this writing, we're about halfway there.

So, whether we call it "sales" or "promotion" or "recruitment," in many ways the process of rallying the community around a project like **EEBO-TCP** emulates what the commercial information producers and sellers have always done — provide librarians with information about scholarly resources and ultimately try to push toward a positive commitment to buy or subscribe. As a librarian with a materials budget, I've spent years avoiding the best efforts of vendors to

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steer my decisions so it's interesting to reflect on this brief role reversal. How does the library world look through the vendor lens, and is the work of "selling" rewarding? Are all those folks with blue exhibitor badges at library conferences living the good life — *La Dolce Vita* — or is it more accurately characterized as *My Life as a Dog*.

Dolce... As a collection development librarian, I know all about the high living habits of vendors so imagine my excitement at the prospect of sharing in this world. The exciting travel — sometimes in first class. London Online? I'm there. Dinner at some of America's finest restaurants — just take along a few customers. More wine? No problem. Need a cab? I'll get that. And on campus in their nice suits (both men and women) and handsome accessories (both men and women) and good haircuts (both men and women). This could be a nice ride, this vendor gig. All I have to remember is to keep my shoes shined.

Dog... Did I tell you about driving in the back seat of a Jetta from Chicago to Urbana-Champaign? Well, it's tight. And when we arrived we learned that the hotel we were supposed to stay at had overbooked so they comped our night's stay at a "sister property." The sister property was a highway motel between a gas station and cornfield but not without some distinctive features: like a bulletproof shield at the "reservations desk." Since our night was free, there was no concern that we would skip out on the bill but there was considerable concern that we might be making phone calls from our rooms. Hence, every time we attempted to leave the motel (and you would want to leave often), we were called back to review and pay any calling charges before driving out of the parking lot.

Or, how about the night I met up with a **ProQuest** colleague at Newark Airport to begin a drive to New Haven. We had both skipped dinner but decided to push on through and settle before eating. We arrived in New Haven at midnight and paid for the remaining Popeye Chicken that was just minutes away from being dumpstered. The "restaurant" was closing so we took the food to our hotel. Only folks from New Haven could appreciate how old and dirty and battered the Downtown Holiday Inn is in that city. As I settled in to my room, with **Letterman** winding down, and cold chicken waiting, I looked in vain for a place where one might consider exposing food to the elements.

And then there was the time we were stuck on 125th St. in New York, wearing very uncool khakis and blazers, suitcases in tow, late for a presentation at Columbia, and gradually coming to realize that the much ballyhooed revival of that famed Harlem street had not yet extended to taxi service. Oh, and how about the 23-hour



flight from Sydney to London, sitting in the middle seat, last row where the chairbacks don't recline but the ones in front sure do. Oh yeah, and the guy on the left is running a fever, coughing, and too sick to eat but apparently not too sick to down a Dewar's every hour, on the hour (and no, he wasn't from **ProQuest** — that guy was on my right).

Dolce... Ask any vendor what they like about their jobs and they'll say it's the people they interact with — maybe they don't mean it but they say it. "The people are so smart and so dedicated, you can't help but feel privileged working in such an environment." And, in

fact, if there is something I'd point to as compensation for the exceptional commitment my institution has made to the **EEBO-TCP**, it would be some wonderful professional interactions with people who "just get it" and appreciate it. Collection officers, subject specialists, and library directors who suspended disbelief and risked some significant dollars to pursue a better, albeit untested, model of building and licensing information resources. Librarians and faculty who, on their own initiative, stepped up and lent a hand to define and promote the project. A colleague who extended a public thank-you for our efforts. Library directors willing to speak at a promotional breakfast about the positive im-

pact the project has had for their libraries and campuses. Board members who give time and effort to make this a successful and responsible initiative. You have to feel privileged.

Dog... Day in and day out, the whining about budgets, the lack of time or will to read email, the arcane decision-making structures — more accurately described as "non-decision-making structures." The skepticism and mistrust and adversarial approach to review and negotiation. And, the sense that, like politics, all decisions are local. No matter what others think or have done, with every institution, every bibliographer, every faculty member, we start from square one with the presupposition that they and only they are in a position to judge the efficacy of an elaborate business plan, SGML tagging schemes, a production and quality control regimen, and all the rest. It is a frustrating environment where a project we believe in deeply is held hostage to some folks who don't have time, don't have interest, or just plain don't have a clue. The conceptually difficult loses out time and time again to the familiar and easy, even if the licensing terms, cost, quality and significance are clearly less advantageous. And while this might seem evident and expected on an institutional level, it has also proven true for too many consortia (but let's not lump them all together since the CIC, and NERL jump started this effort and the JISC has been "brilliantly" supportive and creative on behalf of the U.K.). As you can imagine, it's

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great when someone says “yes,” but you might be surprised to learn that almost nobody ever says “no.” Rather, they say nothing so you have to keep investing and they just keep ducking and dodging. It’s a lot of work to keep pumping all those dry holes.

Dolce... **Michigan** and **Oxford** must be building quite a lot of infrastructure through this. It must be nice to have an infusion of cash to hire new staff, equip their workspaces, and make decisions about millions of dollars of other people’s money. Kind of a rush, actually, to see your vision enacted.


Dog... There are presently nine people paid on **EEBO-TCP** funds. A content specialist/outreach librarian, five reviewers (three at **Michigan** and two at **Oxford**), production coordinators at both institutions (partial appointments) and a programmer (partial). Some of these folks have fall back rights but six of them depend solely on the project’s ability to generate enough revenue to sustain them. There are also an unknown to me number of folks employed on this project by three international keyboarding firms who depend on our continued throughput for their livelihood. Many other staff (technical, bibliographers, legal, P.R., business and finance) from our libraries and campuses are involved — myself included — without compensation from project funds. It is donated time to make a go of an initiative that our library directors believe in. All things considered, it’s a lot of obligation leading to a sometimes too personal sense of responsibility and accountability. If I had wanted to run a small business in life, and assume the personal risks of failure, it would make more sense to do it in a way that affords some upside potential beyond the

vague ideal of advancing scholarship.

Dolce... The **EEBO-Text Creation Partnership** started with a vision that culturally important texts could be accurately and intelligently keyed and tagged and that eventually the texts could find their way into the public domain—a real service to scholarship that could extend beyond the bounds of a hundred privileged campuses. The model put forth was to some extent tailored to the content of the corpus but, at root, we always knew that it could be extended to cover the conversion of other historical corpora. When **EEBO** showed some commercial success for **ProQuest**, there was indeed interest expressed by others not only in converting some of their extensive microfilm holdings but doing so in conjunction with the **EEBO-TCP** model that seemingly had a receptive ear in the marketplace. No doubt, it is nice to be in a position to influence the direction of product development on the commercial side. It is a pleasant surprise to discover some very smart and caring folks in these companies who, all things being equal, would prefer to do things that the market wants rather than forever sailing — and selling — into a headwind. And while I say this generally, I would be remiss not to point out that there are outstanding folks at **ProQuest** that took a risk on our proposed model, worked hard to sell the idea to their own top management, and were willing to accept the consequences if their best judgment turned out to be wrong. I’ll cherish these relationships forever.

Dog... I’ve come to see the commercial producers of scholarly information as a kind of disorganized lot (maybe **Elsevier** will just buy the rest of them and fix all that). While probably well-meaning, there seems to be a lot they don’t know about their market, and in many instances they seem more driven by the needs and demands of content providers and rights holders than of the communities

that will buy and use their products (and let me be clear here that the reader shouldn’t assume I’m talking about **ProQuest** — I’ve had lots of conversations with lots of vendors about moving their content forward). As a group, the vendors suffer from self-imposed isolation that makes it impossible to learn from others — either successes or failures. Without access to information about competitive products that is common knowledge to hundreds of librarians, the vendors seem destined to repeat the mistakes of those that have gone before. While discrete, they appear to take more than a little pleasure in the missteps of their competitors but don’t really have the means or will to learn from those experiences. Rather, they blithely assume that their own efforts will be well received by librarians, their OCR will be stunningly accurate, and their servers will never crash. Maybe like all sales cultures, these publishers and vendor rely more on optimistic projections than sober planning and project management.

So, what’s the answer? Based on my **EEBO-TCP** experience would I consider giving up my library job and acquisitions budget in return for spending my days trying to grab a slice of the budgets of others? As I’ve said above, it’s not without its rewards but I wouldn’t want to be doing it “for real.” For me, it’s the lack of control over outcomes that makes selling stressful and unappealing. No matter how hard you work, how pleasant and obsequious you are to your market, how well you dress, in the final analysis you don’t control your own destiny. You are dependent on the whims of others and that’s a kind of stress that librarians don’t need to covet. It’s bad enough worrying about your own overflowing in-box, but imagine if your income, job security and identity were tied to the in-boxes of ten or twenty or a hundred other people. Be careful what you wish for. 



Adventures in Librarianship — The Dixon Tapes

by **Ned Kraft** (Ralph J. Bunche Library, U.S. Department of State)
<kraftno@state.gov>

If you earned your MLS on or before 1972 you will certainly remember the Carpetgate affair that led to the fall of **Dr. Richard Dixon**, the Dean of **Darkmound University Library**. As a result of the **Freedom of Information** suit brought against the university, the **Superior Court of New York** has forced the release of thousands of hours of **Dixon’s** recorded phone messages and private meetings. The **Dean** apparently bugged his own office in an effort to gather evidence against “enemies” he believed were infiltrating the office disguised as custodial staff, work-

study students, and management consultants.

The **ATG Editorial Board** offers the following partial transcript as a cautionary tale to academic library directors who, like **Dixon**, drink too much coffee and inadequately supervise their serial binding operations. The text is from the April 14th, 1972 meeting between **Dean Dixon** and his administrative counsel, **Rory Haldeminsk**. This segment of the transcript is often referred to as the “smoking gun.”

HALDEMINSK: Sir, we have a problem with the...

DIXON: You’re telling me! Have you seen the [unintelligible] and the teaching staff breathing down my neck about the, about the quality of the collection and so forth. Those [expletive], I’ll give ‘em quality right up the...

HALDEMINSK: Yes.

DIXON: That’s right.

HALDEMINSK: But what I meant was, what I meant to say was about the fund-raising dinner. **Connolly** says people are very unhappy.

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